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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS BLACKSHAW, S/P GREEN

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SUBJECT: DAS MARCIEL AND VIETNAM'S POLICY PLANNING DG DISCUSS KIM JONG-IL, BURMA, ASEAN, AND BILATERAL RELATIONS

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a wide-ranging discussion with visiting EAP DAS Scot Marciel, MFA Director General for Policy Planning Bui Thanh Son offered Vietnam's perspectives on engagement with Burma and the difficulties Vietnam faces in coordinating a more robust ASEAN position on territorial issues in the South China Sea. DAS Marciel emphasized the importance of continued improvements in religious freedom and urged Vietnam to have the confidence to allow its citizens to voice disparate political views. DG Son acknowledged the need for ASEAN's nascent human rights dialogue to be credible, and said that Vietnam would be prepared to take an active role. DG Son demurred on the question of possible S/P talks, noting that his office was already scheduled to meet with the EU on October 31. END SUMMARY.

BURMA

¶2. (SBU) DG Son stated that Vietnam's Burma policy has two principle objectives: to benefit the people of Burma, and to strengthen ASEAN as a whole. To this end, Vietnam has encouraged Burma to implement its roadmap to democracy and to open a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi. Son added that Vietnam is in a unique position to share with Burma its experience in emerging from isolation. DAS Marciel agreed that Burma's leaders would likely listen to messages from Hanoi more readily than from Washington, but suggested that Burma's military rulers were much more cut off from society than Vietnam's were, even twenty years ago. The regime's insistence that its constitutional referendum proceed even as bodies were floating in the Irrawaddy Delta was perhaps the starker example of this. DAS Marciel cautioned that the junta's roadmap is fundamentally flawed because it offers no opportunity for Burma's people to meaningfully participate. DAS Marciel assured DG Son that the United States is not pursuing regime change in Burma, but wanted to see a broadening of the political process. The problem is that the Burmese regime shows absolutely no willingness to make even the slightest opening. DAS Marciel emphasized that without progress, Burma will continue to preclude a U.S.-ASEAN summit. He expressed hope that Vietnam would continue to urge Burmese authorities to implement reforms, open up to the world and begin a dialogue with their people.

ASEAN AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

¶3. (SBU) DG Son voiced frustration over China's attempts to intimidate international companies that might want to work in Vietnam's continental-shelf waters, but could see few options for Vietnam. DG Son agreed that in principle it was in Vietnam's interest to promote a more forceful, coordinated ASEAN position on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. The problem, he explained, was that it was extremely difficult to get ASEAN members to agree on anything more than a simple reaffirmation of the status

quo. DAS Marciel stated that while it takes no position on the legal issues surrounding the competing territorial claims, the USG is concerned about pressure on its companies.

HUMAN RIGHTS

¶4. (SBU) DAS Marciel emphasized that as ASEAN strives to figure out how best to approach human rights, any institution that it creates to deal with the issue must be seen as credible. DG Son agreed, adding that unlike ten years ago, Vietnam was now in a much more confident position and could play an active role within ASEAN on human rights.

¶5. (SBU) DAS Marciel encouraged Vietnam to be similarly confident in allowing its own citizens to voice a variety of political opinions, noting that while there had been progress in religious freedom, there had not been similar advances in political rights and freedom of speech. He emphasized that in order to be able to do their jobs, U.S. diplomats must be able to meet a wide range of people throughout society who hold different views.

NON-ANSWER ON POLICY PLANNING TALKS

¶6. (SBU) DG Son expressed appreciation for S/P Director Gordon's interest in holding policy planning talks, but declined to commit. Son noted that his department was already scheduled to hold talks with EU counterparts on the proposed date (October 31) and again suggested that many of the topics under consideration could be covered in A/S Kimmitt's political-military talks October 6. DAS Marciel pointed out that the United States does not hold policy planning talks with many countries and was interested in learning more about Vietnam's strategic view, particularly on regional affairs. He emphasized that policy planning talks are meant to be

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longer-term and broader in perspective than the pol-mil discussions, which are more narrowly focused.